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An American to Americans

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TELLS

THE TRUTH ABOUT GERMANY

AND THE WAR IN EUROPE



From John L. Stoddard, well known author-traveler, friends in California have received the following letter, dealing with war, war times and the war-stricken:

Meeran (Tyrol), Sept. 14, 1914.

Dear Friends Across the Sea: I fear you have been misinformed about the present war. News must have reached you almost entirely from French and English sources. How incorrect that news can be I know from personal experience. I spent the first month of the war in Italy. From the Italian papers, which received their news from France and England, I formed there an erroneous opinion both of the origin of the war and the events of the campaign. Every effort has been made by France and England to bribe the Italian government, by virtual promises of Trieste and the Trientiner region, to declare war against its former allies. A similar attempt is being made, no doubt, to prejudice public opinion in the United States. It is difficult for the truth to reach you. The German cable has been cut, and letters going out from here, as well as those addressed to Americans in Germany and Austria, are opened, held back or destroyed.

We are cut off from the rest of the world, save as we manage to communicate insecurely through a neutral country. While in Italy I read of revolting German cruelties, of revolutions in Berlin, of the shooting of the socialist, Liebknecht, and even of the unwillingness of southern Germans to fight with their northern brothers—all absolutely untrue. Every achievement of the Germans and Austrians was ignored or minimized. Thus it was for weeks maintained that, although the German army had indeed entered the city of Liege, all its surrounding forts were still in the hands of the enemy! Until I crossed the Tyrolese frontier from Switzerland I had no idea of the amazing successes of the Teutonic forces, or of the wonderful spirit of universal brotherhood, love and devotion to the fatherland which prevailed from the Rhine to the Vistula and from the Danube to the Elbe.

England is trying to give you the impression that this war was instigated by the Emperor William and a military caste in Germany. This is not true. It is a people's war. The Germans stand behind their kaiser to a man. They are fighting for their very existence, threatened and surrounded by a world of foes. If people were not blinded by envy, dazed by fear and hypnotized by the expression, "German War Lord," they would feel both sympathy and admiration for this magnificently disciplined and cultured nation, facing north, south, east and west, to conquer and repel its foes on land and sea! Nor are its princes sitting back, like the royal figureheads of England and Russia, letting their subjects do the fighting.

PRINCES SHOW BRAVERY

The kaiser has six sons and his son-in-law in the field. Four of his sons have been wounded. The heir apparent of Bavaria, the king of Wurtemberg and many other princes have shown not only military capacity, but personal bravery, with their soldiers, under fire. It is impossible to do justice in words to the enthusiasm, the unanimous devotion and the solemn earnestness of the people of Germany and Austria at the present moment. Fathers go to the front, if possible, with their sons. If not, they volunteer for any kind of service at home, and all their women bravely bid them Godspeed. Practically every family in Germany and Austria is represented at one of the frontiers.

The great Bavarian oxen draw the carts around the streets of Munich, since all the horses also have gone out to toil and die for the land that nourished them. I read but yesterday a pathetic list of objects contributed to the Red Cross by people in this little place, too poor to offer money. Among them were rings, bracelets, watches, pictures, some of them precious heirlooms, but now gladly laid upon the altar of the fatherland. Do you suppose that such a unanimous national sentiment as this, which thrills and solemnizes the beholder, and in which every trace of party rivalry has disappeared, can have been called into existence by a "military caste" or war-mad emperor? The sixty millions of this great, educated and enlightened German empire are neither dupes nor fools. They know what they are doing, and why. With them also, shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart, stand many thousands of Americans now in Germany and Austria, who understand the causes of this struggle and the fateful destinies that hang upon this issue. You know the names of many of them. They are for the most part American professors, teachers, writers, students, artists and serious men of affairs, who are temporarily residing in the fatherland. They are not taking sides with Germany for "what there is in it." Nor are they social sycophants. They have not been presented at court, and do not expect to be. They are earnest, level-headed Americans, who love and admire Germany, and realize the enormous debt which they and all the rest of the world owe to her in architecture, music, science, municipal management, commerce, steamship lines and, above all, in her inspiring literature and in her great universities, where thousands of our youth have come for years to complete their education. Nor are they anxious now to hasten back to the United States, as thousands of belated tourists have been obliged to. They feel it both a duty and a privilege to stay and do their utmost to relieve distress, to comfort the bereaved and to assist the Red Cross work, thankful to show their gratitude for the protection, benefits and happiness they have here received.

BLAMES RUSSIA FOR WAR

Now what is it that we, in common with sixty million Germans, believe about this horrible war? First, that the Emperor William is not, as has been represented to you, the cause and promoter of it. The blame for this lies primarily at the door of Russia. Two years ago a

prominent Russian official said to me: "In 1915 you will see great things. Russia has recuperated from the Japanese war, and is burning to recover her lost prestige. The Russian war party cannot be restrained. You will soon see the Teuton's land inundated by the Slavic flood."

Why did Russia intervene in behalf of Serbia? Do you suppose for one moment, in view of her infamous home record and her treatment of the many races crushed by her that she did this from any motive of chivalry? She is merely carrying out her cherished plan of making a Slavic onslaught on the Teuton. In this she is assisted by poor, visionary France and envious England. Yet if Russia should succeed, with the help of her allies, in crushing Germany and Austria, she would prove a menace to the world such as mankind has never seen. It is amazing that this fact is not more universally apprehended. You know what Russia is. Only a short time ago England was holding up her hands in horror at her cruelties and perfidy. Prince Kropotkine, the Russian revolutionist, gave me not long since a book of his, describing present conditions in Russia, and said to me: "The facts I have related here are absolutely true, and are so horrible that, while writing of them, I have scarcely been able to sleep."

There exists in London today a society of eminent publishers, writers and philanthropists, whose purpose is to reveal to their countrymen the infamy of Russia's government. Nevertheless, it is to this despotic, semi-barbaric power that England and France, jealous and apprehensive of the progress and success of Germany, are lending now their aid. But what can they expect if German civilization and culture are crushed, if Germany and Austria are overrun by Cossacks, and if the Tsar's hordes ravage Berlin, Dresden and Vienna. England would clearly rue the substitution of Slavic for Teutonic hegemony. Russia desires to be absolutely master in the Balkans, and once supreme there, would inevitably seize Constantinople. Who then could possibly prevent her doing so? Her love for Serbs is a pretext of transparent thinness. What are these Serbs? A semi-civilized people, who but a few years since murdered their own king and queen and threw their corpses on a dunghill; a people whose atrocities in the recent war with Turkey chilled the blood of all who read of them; a treacherous folk, whose ambition for "pan-Slavic expansion" caused the assassination last July of the future sovereigns of Austria-Hungary. Ask yourselves how England or any other country would have acted if its king, emperor or president had been thus brutally done to death by a neighborhood people, which for years, incited by a foreign foe, had been a constant source of danger and annoyance. How can one overlook that monstrous, culminating provocation when treating of this question?

CONSTANT INTRIGUES

All through the month of July there came no suitable apology or explanation from the Servian government, in spite of positive evidence of the close connection of the Servian war party with the crime at Serajevo. Austria and Serbia should have been allowed to settle this matter by themselves. As one who has resided in the Tyrol for

many years, I can assure you that what the dual monarchy has endured from constant intrigues, treachery and insolent defiance on the part of Servia, all of which were instigated or approved by Russia, no other European nation would have borne so long and patiently; especially in view of the fact that Austria-Hungary has so many millions of Serbs and races affiliated with them in her own territory. The attitude and action of Servia in July were really dictated by the Russian government, which saw in this its wished-for opportunity. Germany's conscience is clear.

Read, if you can obtain a copy of it, Germany's "White Book," which a number of our countrymen are taking back with them to publish and spread broadcast in the United States. Would you have had Germany desert her ally when a huge Russian army was marching on Galicia?

The Emperor William is persistently blamed for declaring war on Russia. But why ignore the fact that he sent telegram after telegram to the Tsar, urging him not to mobilize and send his troops toward Austria? Consider Germany's position, with France prepared to spring on her from one side, and with a million and a half Russians advancing on the other! Quick action was essential for her preservation. Germany mobilized in order, first, to resist the Russian advance; second, to aid her ally, as in duty bound, and thirdly, to protect herself from being crushed between two mighty powers on the east and west. Sixty million Germans in the fatherland and doubtless millions more throughout the world believe that the kaiser acted wisely and rightly in doing as he did, and they will support him and his action to the last gun and the last man. Moreover, as I have said, thousands of Americans now in Germany and Austria are as fully convinced of this as are the Teutons themselves. Do not regard us all as blind and prejudiced until you hear and study the other side.

Above all, look well at England's motives before you give her the approval she is trying now so hard to gain. For the last dozen years I have been a constant reader of English books and newspapers, and I have been profoundly impressed by the ever-recurring lamentation in them over England's lack of enterprise and energy, and especially over the degeneracy visible in her sport-besotted youth. A score of volumes written by Englishmen and countless clippings now in my possession prove the truth of this assertion. A society has recently been formed in London by eminent clergymen, teachers and conservative parents for the express purpose of counteracting this decadent tendency.

We have seen for years how the aged commander-in-chief, Lord Roberts, has, by spoken and written words, tried to create a more virile spirit among his countrymen. But in proportion, as England has perceived and been ashamed of her increasing inefficiency, she has also felt gnawing at her vitals envy and hatred for the nation which was efficient and which was pushing successfully her trade and commerce to those parts of the world where England had been so long pre-eminent that she had come to look upon her trade supremacy there as something given her by divine right.

ENGLAND'S SORDID MOTIVES.

The clearest proof of the sordidness of England's motives is the order she has given the people not to trade with any firm throughout the world which has a German partner! John Burns resigned from the English ministry to show his disapproval of the war; yet in his speech against it you will find no reference to lofty principles, but only arguments to prove that such a war would be disastrous to Great Britain's business interests. That "Nation of Shopkeepers," as Napoleon called England, cannot rise above the money standard. A story illustrates this fact. An Englishman recently said to a German: "We shall fight it out to our last penny." "We," replied the German, "shall fight it out to the last drop of blood." It is significant to see, now that the mask has fallen, how English men and women speak of Germany and her emperor. An English lady had written recently: "We must make the Teuton lick the dust. We must kick him out of recognition."

Moreover, I have just read the following in a letter written by an Englishman: "I hope, this man, William, will be obliged to abdicate, or will be taken prisoner and sent to some island like Napoleon. This blaspheming, hypocritical, lying kaiser will soon have reason, I hope, to regret the day he was born." This is of course the language of a boor. But what shall we say of the Poet Laureate of England, who likens this war of the nations to a conflict between Christ and the devil? This comparison would be ridiculous, if it were not blasphemous, and needs no comment. Still more incredible seems the recent appeal made to the English by the poet, Rudyard Kipling, in which he writes: "Wake! for the Hun is at the gate!" Does it seem possible that any one outside of a lunatic asylum would compare the perfectly disciplined German army, in the ranks of which stand thousands of graduates of the noble universities of Gottingen, Heidelberg, Leipzig and Berlin, to the most barbaric and destructive of the races of antiquity?

One must smile in reading this when one recalls the bitter indictment which the same poet wrote some years ago to warn England against her present ally, Russia, in which he likens the latter to "the bear that walks like a man!" It would be interesting to watch the faces of these fire eaters when they read the news of the behavior of the vaunted English heroes at St. Quentin and Maubeuge. As for the present sentiment of Germany for English it is well expressed in the following passage recently published in a letter: "I can assure you that our indignation against England is much greater than that against Russia and France, for England has betrayed her own blood and bears upon her brow the brand of Cain."

Yet Lady Acton and others have just testified, in a letter to the Times, to the kind treatment which they and many of their compatriots who are detained in Germany have received. They also request that paper to correct the false reports which have been published in regard to the ill treatment of English people by Germans.

It is now known that an understanding had long existed between

Belgium, France and England whereby, in case of war, French troops should be allowed to pass through Belgian territory; but that, if Germany on her part should attempt it, England would intervene. For this much evidence is at hand. History will show that French officers were already in the fortress of Liege when Germany was mobilizing. Two French officers, taken prisoners at Namur, acknowledged that they had arrived there already on the 30th of July.

VIOLATION OF TREATY.

The English claim the violation of Belgian territory by the Germans as their excuse for declaring war. But could either Sir Edward Grey or Mr. Asquith raise his hand and swear upon his honor that they would not have made war just the same, whether or not Belgian soil had been invaded? It was a pretext long before prepared. You know that last July the fate of the English Government was critical. A civil war was imminent in Ulster. Shots had already been fired in Dublin. The Cabinet knew that any day the ground might sink beneath their feet. Hence, eager to avert internal trouble, they grasped with joy the long-awaited opportunity to join with others—for England never fights a European power alone—in ruining German commerce and in destroying the German fleet. How can England, of all nations, talk of violating international rights? Her wars in Asia, Africa and Egypt have all been waged for conquest and the carrying out of her imperial policy. Think of her war against the Boers, universally reprobated abroad and largely condemned at home! Look at her present high-handedness in treating Egypt and the Suez canal as if they were a British province instead of being a Turkish dependency, and, at all events, neutral territory.

Think of her taking from Holland steamers private letters addressed to persons (including thousands of Americans) in Germany and Austria! Consider her efforts to prevent Holland and Scandinavia from sending food to Germany; and, worst of all, think of her calling on the Japanese to do her dirty work for her in destroying the fleet and in capturing the colonies of Germany in distant seas! It seems also to be a fact, which I was at first reluctant to believe, that English firms have furnished and English troops have used the hideously maiming dum-dum bullets, forbidden by the rules of civilized nations. If this were not an established fact, surely the German kaiser would not have telegraphed his protest against it to the President of the United States.

As for the "cruelties" attributed to the Germans, you know the sort of men who compose the German army. You know that in its ranks there stand the representatives of the entire nation, not mere hired soldiers, as in England.

The Germans are unlike the brutal and uneducated Serbs and Cossacks. They are incapable of the barbarities alleged against them by the lying press. Where no attacks have been made upon them by non-combatants in French and Belgian towns such places have been unmolested. Payment has been given, or assured, for all the food-

stuff requisitioned and for damage done. But when civilians have fired upon them from the windows, or have been guilty of abominable attacks on the wounded, as was the case in Belgium, then stern reprisals have been taken. I am not defending war. I hate it unreservedly. But in such cases, alas, there is no other way.

PREDICTS VICTORY.

Of one thing in regard to the terrible conflict I think can be assured, Germany and Austria will finally emerge from it victorious, despite the fearful odds against them. I am, of course, aware that every nation, when intoxicated with the war spirit, deems herself at first invincible; but there is something in the feeling of these Teutons quite unlike the envious hatred of the Briton, the lust for power of the Slav, or the desire for "revenge" which animates the Frenchman. Theirs is a national consecration to the defense of the fatherland and all the culture which it represents. Behind it also stands the staunch, uncorrupted, undegenerate Teutonic character. Again I beg you not to make the mistake of separating in this fearful struggle the German and Austrian peoples from their sovereigns. If you do that, and pity the people, while condemning the emperors, you are absolutely wrong. The Germans love and revere their gifted kaiser, and hold that he was fully justified in acting as he did. Make no mistake about this!

The spirit of the Austrians also, whose difficulties are enormous from the nature of the battleground and from the heterogeneity of their people, is worthy of the land of Andreas Hofer. Here is a passage from a letter written me by an Austrian officer: "I, who am a soldier with all my heart and soul, assure you that I and all my comrades will do our duty with the utmost joy. The enemy may look down into our valley from the mountain crests, but they shall never come down here so long as the last man of us can move. Our good, old, dearly-loved emperor shall have to be contented with his soldiers. We have all sworn No retreat!" The other day when a train of badly wounded soldiers drew in to where the German emperor was waiting to receive them the gallant fellows sang in unison before him the soul-stirring words:

"While yet one drop of life-blood flows
The sword shall never know repose;
While yet one arm the shot can pour
The foe shall never reach thy shore;
Rest, Fatherland, for sons of thine
Will steadfast keep the Wacht am Rhine."

And while the wounded everywhere are singing that immortal song the troops in bivouac at night, in solemn gratitude for victory, unite in chanting in impressive tones that echo over the adjoining hills, the words of Luther's noble tribute to a faith still dear to them:

"Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott!"

(Signed)

JOHN L. STODDARD.